

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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JOHN BROWN HOUSE

Home of the Rhode Island Historical Society  
since July, 1942

[Photograph taken in July, 1949]

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*ISSUED QUARTERLY AT PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND*

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# RHODE ISLAND HISTORY

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## MR. TAMBO AND MR. BONES

Rhode Island in Negro Minstrelsy

by HORACE G. BELCHER\*

GEORGE M. COHAN Memorial Boulevard in Providence is not the first street named by a Providence City Council for a native son distinguished on the stage. Ashcroft Street, running from Richmond to Elbow, the street where he was born, was named after Billy Ashcroft, a popular negro minstrel end man of the late nineteenth century. With Dick Sands, another local product, he shared the billing, *Champion Clog Dancers of the World*. But Billy Ashcroft was nearly as well-known for a song he wrote and sang as for his dancing.

It was called *I'm Going to Place My Name Above the Door*, and its popularity lasted into the present century. Ashcroft did place his "name above the door" by going to England (where negro minstrelsy was also widely popular), marrying an English girl, and becoming owner of a theater in Belfast, Ireland. He made money, giving force to the song's second line, "In fact I should have done it long before."

For nearly sixty years, from 1843 to the beginning of the present century, negro minstrelsy, the only theatrical entertainment originating in America, was the most popular form of stage show. Many stage stars received their early training in minstrelsy, and minstrel acts formed the basis of the variety shows, which followed it. Minstrel stars had the attraction of present day movie stars. Even small boys everywhere organized minstrels for neighborhood juvenile audiences. Providence had a number of minstrels, several of the best known minstrel companies being managed by local men.

\*Mr. Belcher wrote an article, "Old Rocky Point," in the April, 1948, issue of *Rhode Island History*.

In one season in the 1860's at least fifteen road organizations—circuses, variety combinations, and minstrel shows—initiated tours from Providence. Providence was one of the most popular minstrel towns in the country. Minstrel shows had record runs in the local theatres, often beginning the season in August and ending it in late June; and in good seasons some of them even played return engagements.

The Providence Opera House opened the 1877 season on August 10 with Haverly's Minstrels, soon followed by Barlow and Wilson's Minstrels; the Rentz Minstrels; Morris Brothers Minstrels; Barlow, Wilson, Primrose, and West's Minstrels; and finally the San Francisco Minstrels—six companies in one season, all playing to good business. Callender's Georgia Minstrels, managed by the father of Harry Callender, long a box office man in local theaters and later superintendent of the Elks' Home on Washington Street, closed Harrington's Opera House on the site of the present City Hall, on August 1, 1874. The last show staged in the Academy of Music, a long hall on the third floor of the Phoenix Building, located on Westminster Street opposite Orange, was the Old Dominion Minstrels, October 7, 8, and 9, 1878.

From 1843 when Virginia Minstrels started the Minstrel craze that swept the country, until the phonograph and radio came in, America learned many of its popular songs from Negro minstrels. This of course was a time when amusements were few and when singing around the family organ in the parlor was popular. Minstrel soloists sometimes used the same song for several years.

Many of Stephen Foster's songs were first heard in the black face circle, which opened the minstrel show. *Old Folks at Home* was written for Christy's Minstrels and was first published with E. P. Christy's name as composer. *Dixie*, written by Dan Emmett one rainy Sunday in 1859 as a "walk-around," (the march of the minstrels ending the first part) for Bryant's Minstrels, was sung by Emmett every night of the nine years' run from 1859 to 1868 in New York, except during the Civil War, when it was forbidden because it had been adopted by the Southern Confederacy.

*Marching Through Georgia* and *When This Cruel War Is Over*, both popular Civil War songs, were introduced by the minstrels. Dave

Reed and Dave Bryant, as a ducky and his wench, for four hundred nights sang *Shoo Fly, Don't Bodder Me* in Bryant's Minstrels. They got the song from Delehanty and Hengler, two Providence minstrels, whose long career is now remembered for their later white face productions *Fun on the Bristol*, the first musical comedy. Its scenes were laid on the Bristol-New York Sound steamer built in 1867 for the Bristol Line to New York, a competitor of the Fall River Line.

One night in 1863, during the darkest period of the Civil War, a negro minstrel in white face, wearing the blue uniform of the Union army and carrying a musket with fixed bayonet, marched to front center of the stage of a Brooklyn theatre where Hooley's Minstrels were playing an engagement that lasted several years. Leaning on his musket, he sang for the first time a song that found instant echo in the hearts of his listeners—*Tenting on the Old Camp Ground*.

Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,  
Wishing for the war to cease.  
Many are the hearts that are looking for the Right,  
To see the dawn of Peace.

He sang that song every night for more than two years; the country sang it for more than a generation.

Some of the minstrel soloists later won fame in other fields. Ira D. Sankey, who sang the hymns and led the big gospel choruses during his nearly thirty years' association with Dwight L. Moody after 1870 (while Moody and Sankey were world famous evangelists), was a popular baritone ballad singer in Campbell's Minstrels in his younger days, under the name George Julian. George B. Frothingham of The Bostonians, premier concert quartette of the nineties, had been a minstrel basso.

Many leading players on the American stage in the latter half of the last century and early years of this one started in blackface.

Minstrelsy was responsible even for two long lived stage favorites of New England country life, *The Old Homestead* and *The Country Fair*. During his years as a minstrel end man Denman Thompson developed his character of Joshua Whitcomb in *The Old Homestead* from a skit he played at the Theatre Comique in Providence; Neil Burgess evolved his popular Aunt Abigail in *The Country Fair* from the negro wench he had played in the minstrel second part.

In their younger days, Charles, Daniel, and Gustaf Frohman, who during the gay nineties managed the leading theatres in New York and the outstanding stars of the American and English stage, were minstrel advance men or managers. Daniel Frohman's first theatre work was in Providence, in advance of the appearance here of the Georgia Minstrels in the summer of 1874. This was the original troupe of negroes. Dan's brother Gus was its manager for eight or nine years. It was one of the most popular troupes on the road, especially among the colored people in the South. Despite their color, the real negro minstrels always blacked up with burnt cork.

Charles H. Duprez, who began and ended his amusement career in Rhode Island, coming here from his native New Brunswick, is credited with originating the minstrel parade, which in the days when men stopped work from noon until one o'clock to eat a substantial dinner, was a big attraction. It started at the theatre where the minstrels were playing and was headed by the minstrel brass band. "Doubles in brass" read the "Minstrel At Liberty" ads in the New York *Clipper*, and even if a man did not play, he could carry an instrument and go through the motions. But nearly all of them could play pretty well, especially after the season was far enough advanced to give them practice. Some minstrel bands were accounted really good, even in the days when Providence had four or five brass bands and many smaller places had at least one.

The parade was headed by a banner bearing the name of the minstrel company in large, ornate lettering. It was carried by a boy who was visibly impressed not only with his job but also with the recollection that it was bringing him a pass for that night's show. The parades of Duprez and Benedict's New Orleans Minstrels were headed by two Dalmatian coach dogs, a breed then rare here. These dogs strained at a leash held by a small colored boy. The two dogs each wore a crimson blanket on which in letters of gold was the name of the company. They got plenty of exercise, for Duprez sent them all over town in the afternoons. Duprez was one of the few minstrel managers who did not play in his own show. He was a box office man and the shrewdest publicity man in the business. He originated many innovations that were generally adopted, including the parade, the band, and later, parade uniforms for all the minstrels.

Lew Benedict, for fifteen years his partner, was a popular end man who came from Pawtucket.

Behind the banner came the minstrel band, the earlier ones distinguished from the other minstrels only by their instruments. There was a pleasant little custom among many of the small boys of Providence, when a brass band headed every parade and when parades were frequent here, of stationing themselves well within eyesight but out of reach of players using a wind instrument. Then, when the parade started, each boy would produce a lemon or a juicy, dripping sour pickle—a big two-center—which he would suck after first attracting the attention of his victim. The sight would make the player's mouth water, thereby causing sour notes which sometimes took effect at a critical period. But the boys never did this to the minstrel bands, another indication of how minstrels were regarded in the days when the horse cars had straw on the floor to keep feet warm in the winter.

In later years the minstrel bands wore distinctive costumes. Duprez introduced the custom with Duprez and Benedict's New Orleans Minstrels, which he headed for twenty years during which it was one of the most successful companies on the road. It was Duprez's second minstrel company, the first being Duprez and Greene's Minstrels, formed in Providence with J. A. Greene (brother of "Eph" Greene a well-known local character) as his partner. This company played summer engagements at Rocky Point's Forest Circle in the 1860's, taking to the road in the fall.

Two by two, or if the company was a large one, three abreast, spaced to cover the street's width, the minstrels marched. Each man wore a tall hat, at first of black fur or silk, but later of tan cloth to match his topcoat. Every man carried a cane, a dress accessory then carried only by the solid men of the community on Sundays. Black trousers completed the costume.

When others imitated his parade costumes, Duprez designed more spectacular ones by adding dark broadcloth capes lined with red satin, the front thrown back over the shoulder on either side to show the brilliant lining. When a good looking man with a handle-bar mustache came along in an outfit like that, he roused every boy's ambition to be a minstrel when he grew up.

In 1870 Duprez broke minstrel tradition by presenting four end men instead of the usual two. Two of the four were among the brightest lights in minstrelsy—Lew Benedict and Hughey Dougherty, famed for his stump speeches. The other two were Gleason and Reynolds, who opened the show while Benedict's and Dougherty's chairs remained empty.

Duprez set another precedent in that season of 1870 by taking his company of twenty-eight from Philadelphia where they had played for fourteen months, to San Francisco, where he paid \$10,000 in gold for four weeks' rental of the California Theatre and took in \$2,000 on the first night. The minstrels turned people away every night, both here and at mining towns in the interior. It was one of the most profitable seasons ever known by any minstrel company. Duprez and Benedict's Minstrels were consistent money makers through two decades, yet when Duprez died at the Rhode Island Hospital in August, 1902, in his seventy-seventh year, he had little money. He had lost heavily in trying to again popularize a run-down hotel in Lowell.

He spent the summers from 1892 to 1902 at shore resorts on Narragansett Bay, handling amusement features. He brought the first Ferris wheel in Rhode Island to Rocky Point, where he had started more than 30 years before with a Spanish carrousel, an early form of merry-go-round. In his last summer he was moderately successful with a boat merry-go-round at Crescent Park.

An empty orchestra pit greeted minstrel audiences. The curtain rose to the opening strains from a full orchestra in black face and minstrel costume, grouped on a tiered elevation behind the front rows of minstrels. In the center of the front row was the interlocutor in white face and evening dress. Foil for the end men's jokes, he introduced the soloists and the end men. He was usually a basso and often a soloist during the first part. Seated minstrels on



MR. TAMBO



his left held tambourines, those on his right having a pair of bones in each hand. In earlier days these were curved bones from a rib-rioste, whose rhythmic rattle played a tune like that of a drummer. In later days black walnut or ebony bones were used. Many small boys made a pair from the Sunday roast and learned to rattle them in time. The rattle of the bones and tambourines marked the opening flourish of the minstrel show.

At each end of the front row of minstrels was an empty chair with bright satin covering or, after Duprez set the precedent, two chairs. These were for the end men, the stars of minstrelsy, who were given individual introductions as they entered to a flourish by the orchestra. As the end men came on stage, one by one the entire front row of minstrels rose, and remained standing until the end men had taken their seats. Then the interlocutor said, "Gentlemen, be seated," and the show started with a joke by an end man, using the interlocutor as foil. The first part was a running dialogue of jokes between end men and the middleman, interrupted at intervals by soloists, the entire company joining in nearly all the choruses.

The ballad singers in the first part sang mostly of home, mother, and dead sweethearts, for they took their pleasures sadly then. Dick Wambold of the San Francisco Minstrels was famous for his song, *Dear Mother, I Come Home* and H. Percy sang *Do They Think of Me at Home?* in George Christy's Minstrels at the Academy of Music in 1863. Christy's Minstrels made *Darling Nelly Gray* popular for years from one end of the country to the other, although it was later neglected until its revival in vaudeville in 1917. Richard J. Jose, one of the later balladists, was noted for his singing of *With All Her Faults, I Love Her Still*, and more especially for *Silver Threads Among the Gold*. He was a contra-tenor with unequalled ability to maintain high notes.

The first part ended with a "walk around," in which all the front row minstrels followed each other up and down the stage, ending



MR. BONES

in the wings. This "walk around" always was a lively air, and about 1868 many companies used *Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines*, which became a popular craze with its ringing chorus:

I'm Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines,  
I give my horse good corn and beans;  
Of course 'tis quite beyond my means,  
Tho' a Captain in the Army.

The second part (which in earlier days included banjo playing, negro songs, bone solos, and dancing—*The Essence of Old Virginia* and others—and a sketch or two, with later additions of stump speeches and individual acts) often ended in a sketch that included a number of the company. In the earlier, smaller companies that developed from the Virginia Minstrels group of four men, every man did his own individual specialty and then took part in several other acts. In after years the second part was largely given over to outside acts—variety—with some individual turns by minstrel stars.

In the later days of minstrelsy the first part was a gorgeous sight, with the minstrels all in satin clothes, trousers of blue or black, coat and vest of scarlet. The cut was an exaggeration of evening dress, the coat having large lapels and broad, long tails, black wig and white shirt front setting it off well. The end men wore similar suits in one color, usually scarlet. Sometimes the wigs were white and white gloves replaced the usual black. "Big Dick" Melville, an early Providence minstrel and later manager, saw such a show in 1897, some 20 years after he had left the minstrel stage, and was disgusted with it. He said it was not minstrelsy.

In 1858 when Melville ran away from his home in Providence at the age of thirteen to join a wagon circus as a minstrel in the after-show concert, minstrels wore striped pantaloons held to the boot instep by straps and reaching up to the armpits, a checked cotton shirt, a short vest, and a clawhammer coat with extra long tails that came to the heels. A wooly wig and a stovepipe hat of fur was almost met by a collar which reached to the ears and had enormous wings projecting to the shoulders. The boots had soles about ten inches broad by some three feet in length.

A Boston company, the Ethiopian Serenaders, introduced black dress suits; and Col. Jack Haverly, whose *40-Count 'Em-40* was famous advertising, originated the minstrel spectacle and introduced the satin costumes.

The earlier end men's songs by Mr. Bones and Mr. Tambo were a mess of odds and ends of nonsense thrown together in a purposeless way supposed to reflect the happy-go-lucky character of the stage darky. They depended for their effectiveness on the personality of the man singing them. A song of this type was sung by "Big Dick" Melville as an end man:

Listen, children, to this line.  
Do you know where Alec Stevens lives?  
Hi! Look out dar, listen again,  
Do you know where Alec Stevens lives?  
Cow catcher in de front  
Do you know where Alec Stevens lives?  
Cow catcher in de behind,  
D'ye know where Alec Stevens lives?  
'Deed I wait, 'deed I know  
Where Alec Stevens lives.

Melville's first show broke up at Bangor, Maine. He then joined J. A. Greene's Mocking Bird Minstrels, a female troupe organized at Providence, the home of Greene, a one time partner of Duprez. Melville was with a number of minstrel companies, with time out for the Civil War service. He ended with the best known of them all, Buckley's Serenaders, in 1877.

During summers spent at home, he ran the Forest Circle, an open air theatre at Rocky Point, which gave minstrel shows, including a stock company of female minstrels and variety shows. The Four Cohans: Jerry, Nellie, Josephine, and George M. of Fox Point played there during several seasons. In his last days Melville owned a road house at Diamond Hill.

The olio in a minstrel show, occupying the interval while the stage was being set for the second part, included individual acts; and often, here or in the second part, a stump speech was featured. Harry Bloodgood of Providence—his real name was Carlo Mauran—was a noted stump speaker, billed as being able to make a horse laugh. Wearing a linen duster trimmed with old and frayed sealskin, he stood behind a table, which he thumped at intervals with an old umbrella of the bumbleshoot variety.

He introduced one of his stump speeches in his native city with "Friends, Enemies, and Fellow Citizens: It is with much disappointment that I am with you this evening. It was my intention to address

a large and cultured audience at Hillsgrove, but on entering the depot I discovered my train speeding out. With superhuman effort, I succeeded in catching hold of the railing of the last car and swinging myself aboard, was surprised to find that the train took a switch and stood still. Finally it began to go backward until it was sidetracked back into the depot from which we started. Hence my appearance here this evening."

The dances were heavy, and the minstrels put work into them. The *Essence of Old Virginia*, popular about the time of the Civil War, was a loose-jointed dance, the performer's body and arms swinging and the whole body gyrating. It was an imitation of the old plantation hoe-down and was never seen in minstrelsy in later days, its place being taken by fancy clog and reel, for which Delehanty and Hengler were noted. Frank Brower, of the original Virginia Minstrels, after whom an old-time Warwick roadhouse was named, was the first to dance the *Essence*. John Diamond, a famous minstrel dancer, introduced the jig in blackface. Jerry Cohan used to do Irish jigs in whiteface in his minstrel act.

About the opening of this century, a popular saloon was located at Peck's wharf (the foot of Peck Street), Providence. The sign above the door read *Old Bob Ridley*, and some of the younger men, who there refreshed the inner man in the days when a saloon was the one place of sanctuary from women, addressed the rotund, jolly man in the white apron, who served behind the black walnut bar, as "Bob." The place had sawdust on the floor, large and capacious spittoons, a brass rail at the foot of the counter for weary feet, and a general air of coziness.

The bartender and owner was Ben Cotton of Pawtucket, a man built on the lines of the famous end man, Billy Rice, and almost as great a favorite in the minstrel days from which he had then only recently retired. *Old Bob Ridley* was a minstrel character dance, given by an old negro with a crooked cane and a large red bandanna handkerchief. In his day Ben Cotton had been acknowledged the best of those dancing it.

With Billy Birch, another great end man, Ben Cotton organized Birch and Cotton's Minstrels in 1862; and later, with Billy Arlington, managed Arlington, Cotton, and Kemble's Minstrels. But he was

best known for Cotton and Murphy's Minstrels, one of the most popular troupes on the road. His partner was Joe Murphy, later a favorite Irish comedian, whose years of playing *The Kerry Gow* and *The Shaughraun* made him one of the richest men in the theatre.

When he died in 1907, Ben Cotton in his lifetime of eighty years had seen the beginning, the rise, and the end of the first distinctively American stage entertainment.

Noah D. Payne was another local minstrel manager who had a real novelty, for he organized in Providence in the early 1860's the first company of female minstrels for a tour of New England. This company opened the new outdoor theatre at Rocky Point, already named the Forest Circle. The Forrest Amazons had to include a few men for basses in the quartette and choruses, but the otherwise all-woman circle was a popular novelty. Payne later published the Providence *Morning Herald* from 1867 to 1872. He ended his career as owner of a printing office at Eddy and Washington streets.

"Big Dick" Melville later had companies of female minstrels at Rocky Point, and the Theatre Comique at Weybosset and Orange Streets opened its variety show with a stock company of female minstrels after 1875.

On the yellow cover of Sam Sharpley's *Ironclad Minstrels Songster* is a woodcut of a long, lanky chap seated with a banjo on his knee, his pantaloons held down by straps under the insteps of his boots, and with chin whiskers in paint brush style. This was a picture of Sam himself, one of the most popular minstrels of the 1860's and the early 1870's. He hailed from Philadelphia, but overcame that handicap by marrying a Providence girl under his own name, Samuel S. Sharp, and hiring a tenement on Rhode Street, between Plain and Eddy. In his twenty years as a minstrel he headed several companies and had a number of interests.

At one time he led Sam Sharpley's Silver Minstrels, who used to present silver-plated articles to members of the audience. When they played here at Harrington's Opera House on Exchange Place, they gave away among other things, silver vases — Sharpley may have wanted to impress his mother-in-law. But the company gave out more silver than it took in.

In 1860 with John L. Carncross, another well-known minstrel, he organized Carncross and Sharpley's Minstrels, opening in his

native Philadelphia for a long run. When he withdrew, the company became Carncross and Dixey's Minstrels, a very successful troupe. And when Tony Pastor, then only a well-known singer, opened Pastor's Bowery Opera House in New York in July, 1865, Sam Sharpley was his financial backer. Tony Pastor's became one of the most popular variety houses in the world, but that was after Sharpley, discouraged by its slow start, had withdrawn. He was one of the best money makers among the minstrels, but he lost in every other venture.

With Ben Cotton of Pawtucket he formed Cotton and Sharpley's Minstrels, which did capacity business at the Academy of Music in the Phoenix Building. The company became Cotton and Murphy's Minstrels after Sharpley withdrew to form Sam Sharpley's Ironclad Minstrels, his best known company, which had a long and very successful life.

It was of Sam Sharpley that one of minstrelsy's classics was told. One of his companies had a run of poor business, and word was passed at the end of a performance before a quarter-filled house that the "ghost would not walk" that night. Most of the minstrels took the loss of their anticipated salary philosophically, but the indignation of a German was roused.

"Vot!" he said, "No money? No salary? I von't stand for it! I don't take this make-up off until I get my money!"

Sharpley had an idea that Providence would support a hall devoted exclusively to negro minstrelsy, such as New York, Philadelphia, and some other cities had. But the venture was a failure here, although his Ironclads always topped the record on their local appearances. In 1861 they played for a week in Howard Hall, in the Howard Building, Westminster and Dorrance streets, although three nights was the usual minstrel engagement here.

In 1874, after 20 years in blackface, Sam Sharpley came home to spend the two or three months the doctors told him he had left. At first he walked every day from the home of his mother-in-law, with whom he was living at Eddy and O'Connell streets, down to Weybosset and Orange, where the LaFayette billiard hall on the second floor of an old wooden building was being made into a variety theatre—the noted old Theatre Comique. He was much

interested in the success of this venture, the second variety house in Providence, although he had no financial investment in it.

He believed it would be a success, and it was; but he never saw a performance there, for he died on January 1, 1875, only a month or so after its opening. He was only forty-three when he heard his last applause. He lies in Locust Grove Cemetery on Elmwood Avenue, in a corner unmarked by a stone.

There were many other Rhode Islanders in negro minstrelsy: Sam Spinning (Samuel B. Spinning), in 1907 last survivor of the noted Campbell's Minstrels of the early 1880's; Macklin, of Macklin and Wilson—the Wilson being Francis Wilson, later of *Ermine* fame; and Billy Chase, later a popular comedian at the Theatre Comique and in the early century a ticket seller at a local theatre.

Pat S. Masterson, who played bass viol in the orchestra at B. F. Keith's Theatre (later the Empire) on Westminster Street for a dozen years before his death, was in Skiff and Gaylord's Minstrels in 1871. Another local manager was M. B. Leavitt, who managed Leavitt's Gigantean Minstrels. Cliff Burgess was another local minstrel, who found his fortune in England, where Moore and Burgess's Minstrels had a permanent stand at St. James's Hall, London. All were Providence minstrels; most of them, native sons.

Sheridan and Mack, long popular in minstrelsy and later in vaudeville, were natives of Providence. They had few equals as





clog dancers. Their popular *Fun on the Bristol*, called the first musical comedy, was developed from their minstrel skit. George H. Coes, of Schoolcraft and Coes, another popular team that started in blackface and ended in white, came from this city. Then there was Jerry Cohan, father of the famous George M. He was in minstrelsy as early as 1867 as end man and comedian and introduced Irish sketches in the second part. *The Dublin Dancing Master*, *The Dancing Professor*, and *Paddy Miles, the Irish Boy* were some of his specialties. George M. himself, while in partnership with Sam Harris, sent out the Cohan and Harris Minstrels in 1908.

Tony Hart, of Harrigan and Hart, whose *Mulligan Guards* and other plays of New York life became folk lore of the big city, where they were favorites through many years, got his start in Providence in Melville's Minstrels, formed here by "Big Dick" Melville. A brother of Dennis H. Sheahan, local attorney, found Tony, whose real name was Cannon, on the street one night. He had run away from an orphan's home in Worcester and walked here. He had a fine voice and Sheahan introduced him to Archie Stalker, then owner of the Washington Varieties, a beer hall opened by Joseph R. Thornton, who in his later years sold gallery tickets at the old Providence Opera House.

The Washington Varieties, on the second floor of a building on the Washington street side of the present City Hall site, had a bar at one end of the hall, a stall stage at the other, the floor space being filled with tables. The boy sang here one night among the variety acts and next day got his minstrel opening.

He was short and slight, his build and voice fitting female impersonation, and he became one of the best of minstrel wenches. Even after he joined Edward Harrigan, they continued for a time as a minstrel team before becoming Irish comedians and one of the most popular teams in New York, where for years they had their own theatre.

When minstrelsy as an entertainment began to lose popularity, Frank Dumont thought the public would welcome a chance to see how it was given in the early days. He had been a minstrel since 1862, was a featured member of Duprez and Greene's Minstrels, and later managed for many years the Eleventh Street Opera House in Philadelphia, which presented negro minstrelsy continuously from



1853 to 1910, the longest run of any single attraction at any theatre in the world.

In 1917 Dumont organized a company costumed in the field hand style of early minstrelsy, using copies of old scenery and many of the old minstrel gags—in short, a twentieth century reproduction of minstrelsy of the 1850's and 1860's.

It was a quick failure. The public would not have it. The old days were gone, and negro minstrelsy was dead.

\* \* \*

### BURIED TREASURE

For the benefit of the reader whose pulse quickens at the thought of pirate gold and who might wish to spend a vacation hunting treasure, we take pleasure in presenting the following document. It was recently discovered among the manuscripts collected by the late George L. Shepley, now owned by the Society. Judging from the group of manuscripts in which it was found, the probable author was a buccaneering Greene or Arnold from East Greenwich. Its date, as evidenced by the form of handwriting, appears to fall sometime in the first half of the eighteenth century.

C. A. C. 3rd.

att J L att B O at the S E side of the Bay there is a Creek and on the South side of the Bay: 50: yds from the waters side there is a Large hollow oake Tree with one Limbe Cut of 11 yds from the Tree their is a Rock and from the Rock N W: 7: yds and from the tree: 14 yds the within sum is hid

20 Barrs of	} Gould	1 Silver Plat	} Silver
20 Wedges of		1 Silver Candlestick	
8 Jacobesus		2200 Pieces of Eight	
11 Plain Rings		3 Dimonds	
4 Dubel D Loons		1 Ruby	
1 Brasel			

[Shepley Library v. 14, p. 161]



Halftone in R. I. H. S. Library

**PROVIDENCE OPERA HOUSE**

Dorrance, Pine, and Eddy streets  
Opened December 4, 1871. Razed in 1931.

## NEWS-NOTES

### NOTICE OF CLOSING

John Brown House will be closed to members and the public from December 5 to January 3. This is the period of the year when the facilities of the Society are the least used. In this interval the library staff will be able to work without interruptions, catching up on work that insures a better operation of the library as a whole.

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A genealogy of interest to thousands of Rhode Islanders has recently come from the press. *Roger Williams of Providence* is compiled and published by Mrs. C. W. Anthony and Mrs. C. H. Weeden. This book contains the genealogical records of the Roger Williams Family Association, which have been collected during the past fifty years. Copies may be purchased from the Librarian at the Rhode Island Historical Society. Price: \$6.00.

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Mr. Monahan attended the annual meeting of the American Association for State and Local History held in Burlington, Vermont, in September. This association, which attempts to integrate the work of historical societies, has just issued a quarterly magazine in color, called *American Heritage*. Many members of this society will probably be interested in subscribing to this periodical. The Librarian will be glad to show the first issue to anyone who cares to see it. Price: \$3.00 a year.

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After two summers of thorough archeological research the excavation of the area surrounding and beneath the Old Stone Mill at Newport has been completed. Though the detailed report on the work will not appear for some time, Mr. William S. Godfrey of Harvard University, who supervised the digging, in his preliminary release has dealt a blow to the hopes of those who believe that the structure was built by Norse or other pre-Columbian voyagers.

Nothing of European origin antedating the English settlement was discovered, and all evidence brought to light appears to indicate that, whether originally intended for a mill or not, the much debated "tower" is of 17th century origin.

The *Index to the Early Records of the Town of Providence . . .*, compiled by Richard Le Baron Bowen, will be published by the Society. A review of this book by Clarence S. Brigham is on p. 128 of this issue.

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*The Rhode-Island Almanac, for the year, 1729 . . .* by Poor Robin. Newport, James Franklin, 1729, has been purchased by the Society. It is an example of printing in the second year after the establishment of a press in Rhode Island and is a valuable addition to the Society's collection of Rhode Island imprints.

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Mrs. Clifford K. Rathbone volunteered to arrange chronologically the Carter-Danforth Papers. This collection contains manuscripts of John Carter, famous editor of the *Providence Gazette* in the late eighteenth century; of Benjamin B. Carter, physician, supercargo, and scholar in the early nineteenth century; and of Walter R. Danforth, attorney for the Brown family and mayor of Providence during the 1850's.

Mr. Bradford F. Swan has arranged the rare books and non-Rhode Island imprints in the third floor vault.

Volunteer help from our members and friends is always welcomed. Because of a limited staff, the Society finds that assistances of this kind is of great value.

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The following book is available from the National Society Colonial Dames of America in Louisiana, 2703 Napoleon Avenue, New Orleans, Louisiana: *Vital Statistics Records of Oldest Protestant Church in Louisiana, 1849-1900*. Price: \$10.00.

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Mr. Roelker has been elected vice-president of the East Greenwich Free Library, one of the earliest public libraries in Rhode Island. The first president was Governor William Greene, Mr. Roelker's great-grandfather, and the family has long been closely associated with the institution.

## WHY RHODE ISLAND OPPOSED THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION

by HILLMAN METCALF BISHOP

### POLITICAL REASONS

[concluded from July, 1949, v. 8, no. 3, p. 95]

RIGHTLY or wrongly three-quarters of the freemen of Rhode Island were convinced that the Constitution was a threat to their liberties and a dangerous departure from the form of government in which they believed. Why did so many Rhode Island voters regard the Constitution as a threat to their liberties? *Liberty* is a vague word and it can mean quite different things to different people. To our Revolutionary forefathers, liberty meant minimum compulsion by the state or freedom from social constraint. In his widely read *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine had maintained that, "Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil."

In eighteenth century Rhode Island the great majority of the people believed in a way of life and a philosophy of government which, at the risk of oversimplification, we might summarize as a sort of extreme conception of Jeffersonian democracy—particularly in its emphasis on the minimized state and its attachment to popular control of government. We are familiar with Jefferson's famous phrase, "That government is best which governs least." Some Rhode Islanders would have applauded Henry David Thoreau's extreme version of the minimized state, *i. e.* "That government is best which doesn't govern at all."

In the farming communities during the eighteenth century very little government was necessary. The towns had not yet developed a system of common public schools. About the only important functions performed by government in colonial America were the building of roads, the settlement of disputes, and the enforcement of contracts between individuals. Montesquieu in his widely quoted *Spirit of Laws* had written, "constant experience shows us, that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it."<sup>65</sup> In describing the government under the Articles of Confederation, John Quincy Adams made this comment years later: "The predominating spirit

<sup>65</sup>Quoted in the *Newport Herald*, December 25, 1788, under the title of "On Liberty."

in the institution of the governments of the states and of the Confederacy was the jealousy of powers."<sup>66</sup>

Jealousy of power. Not merely jealousy of monarchical or arbitrary power, but jealousy of *all* political power. Most men of the Revolutionary period took it for granted that it was the nature of all governments to seek to acquire more power. "Ambition and the lust for power,"<sup>67</sup> and "lust of dominion and power,"<sup>68</sup> were phrases which rolled easily from the tongues of Rhode Islanders in 1787.

To the Federalists the liberty to which the people of Rhode Island were attached meant anarchy and license.<sup>69</sup> The "licentiousness of the people" was one of their favorite phrases. Commerce was languishing; the public debt was not being paid; and the people were in a revolt against the high taxes necessary to pay the public debt created by the war. The Federalists wanted a "supreme countrolling power" because they were the principal victims of the weak government, the minimized state which the people preferred, at least in Rhode Island. Since the most prominent Federalists had insisted only a few years earlier that freedom and power were opposites, they were now in the position of trying to undo the effects of their skillful propaganda against the Continental Impost. The reply of the Anti's was to accuse the Federalists of being "champions for unlimited power."<sup>70</sup>

Expressed in one sentence, the attitude toward government held by the great majority of Rhode Island freeholders might be summarized in the famous aphorism of the great nineteenth century English liberal, Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."<sup>71</sup> If we modify this phrase to read

<sup>66</sup>John Quincy Adams, *Parties in the United States* (New York, 1941) p. 4.

<sup>67</sup>"Euripides," a leading member of the Country Party in an exchange of polemics with "Civis" (William Ellery) in the *Newport Mercury*, July 16, 1787.

<sup>68</sup>"Honest Man of West Greenwich," *Newport Mercury*, January 2, 1787.

<sup>69</sup>"I once thought that there was virtue enough in these Eastern States to admit of Liberty in its greatest extent; but from late experience I begin to think that we do not deserve the privileges we are possessed of, and unless power is lodged somewhat to controul the vice and folly of the people we shall soon be involved in all the horrors of anarchy and Confusion." William Ellery to Nathaniel Appleton, October 2, 1786. William Ellery Letter Book, Newport Historical Society. See also "A Friend to the State of R. I.," *Newport Herald*, June 28, 1787, and "Civis," *ibid.*, July 19, 1787.

<sup>70</sup>Footnote 68; also reply by "Civis" (William Ellery) in *Newport Mercury*, January 8, 1787.

<sup>71</sup>Quoted by Herman Finer in the Preface to John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, *Essays on Freedom and Power* (Boston, 1948) p. xi.

*all power corrupts and all power tends to become absolute*, it would describe the view of government held by most Rhode Island freemen in the eighteenth century. In other words, the freemen of Rhode Island were, like Jefferson, convinced that the greater the powers of government, the more dangerous that government becomes to the rights of man.

If "all power is dangerous," as the Federalists rightfully accused their opponents of believing, how could this natural tendency of governments to encroach upon the rights of the people be restrained? The Rhode Island answer was pretty much the same as Jefferson's answer: Democracy; that is, keeping government as dependent as possible on the people.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Rhode Island was the closest approach this hemisphere has ever seen to democracy in the Greek sense of the term, *i. e.*, direct rule by the majority of the people. The early compacts, agreements, or charters of the people of Providence, Newport, and Portsmouth proclaim the Rhode Island attachment to what was called a "democratical form of government." In his *History of Democratic Ideas* Gooch describes colonial Rhode Island in these words:

If democracy . . . in its ultimate meaning be held to imply not only a government in which the preponderant share of power resides in the hands of the people, but a society based on the principles of political and religious freedom, Rhode Island beyond any other of the American Colonies is entitled to be called democratic.<sup>72</sup>

In 1773 Chief Justice Horsmanden of the Province of New York, a member of the commission appointed by Great Britain to investigate the burning of the *Gaspee*, in his report to the Earl of Dartmouth, said of this colony:

My Lord, as to the Govern<sup>t</sup>, (if it deserves that name) it is a down-right Democracy: the Gov<sup>r</sup> is a mere nominal one, and therefore a Cypher, without power or authority, entirely controuled by the populace elected annually, as all other Magistrates & officers whatsoever.<sup>73</sup>

Rhode Island under its colonial charter was not only a democracy but an absolute or an *unmixed* democracy. That is, the government was entirely devoid of those checks and balances created in our

<sup>72</sup>Quoted by Vernon L. Parrington in his chapter on Roger Williams in *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1927) v. 1, p. 73.

<sup>73</sup>Bartlett, *op. cit.*, v. 7, p. 182.

Federal Constitution to check and restrain "the excesses of democracy"—to guard the minority against the "tyranny of the majority."

Under the charter in effect from 1663 to 1842 all real power was vested in the legislature. The Governor had no veto power and no appointive power. Actually the Governor was hardly more than the presiding officer of the Upper House of the legislature, called the Senate. The judiciary was elected by the legislature every year. If the legislature, called the General Assembly, did not like the decisions of the courts, they could not only elect other judges at the end of the year but they could in effect set aside decisions of the courts. That is, the General Assembly might order new trials, and did perform some of the functions of a supreme court of appeals. The Upper House of 10 Assistants, Governor, and Deputy Governor were elected by the direct vote of the people at large; or by the vote of the entire state. The result was that when one party carried the state by a substantial majority, as the Country Party did from 1786 to 1790, they were in complete control of all branches of the government. Since the Upper House was elected at large, there were sometimes no opposition members at all in the Senate.

The Lower House, or Assembly, was elected by the freemen in town meetings every six months. This gave to the opposition some representation in the Lower House, but it also resulted in the Assembly's being particularly dependent on the voice of the people. During the period under discussion it was customary for the freemen at the time of election to instruct their deputies how to vote on specific issues. Important bills, and particularly those measures on which there was considerable disagreement within the Country Party, were frequently referred to the voters for their consideration in special town meetings. What compensation the deputies received was paid not by the state but by the town. The result was that a deputy who disregarded his instructions was likely to receive no compensation when he returned home.

Under the Articles of Confederation the people of a state, or more exactly the state legislature, had the same close control over their members of Congress that the voters of Rhode Island had over their General Assembly. In fact, Madison, Hamilton, and many of the other framers of the Constitution regarded this as one of the chief defects of the Articles. Members of Congress were to be "annually



appointed in such manner as the legislature of each state shall direct." The Articles also reserved to each state the power "to recall its delegates, or any of them, at any time within the year, and to send others in their stead, for the remainder of the year." In addition, the salaries or expenses of members of Congress were paid by the state legislature frequently upon their return from Congress. It should also be remembered that in nearly all important matters Congress was largely dependent on the state legislatures to carry out its recommendations.

All this was quite different from the government established by the Federal Constitution. Under the Constitution there was a system of what was called mixed government; that is, a blending of aristocracy and democracy with some of the features characteristic of monarchy. The democratic element was supplied by the House of Representatives chosen for two years. The President was chosen by a complicated indirect process for a four-year term. The Senate was also indirectly elected by the state legislatures for six years—a very long term for that period. Even John Adams had said: "Where annual elections end tyranny begins." To cap the climax the judges were chosen for life.

The lengths to which the framers of the Articles of Confederation had gone to make members of Congress, whose power was largely advisory, subject to the control of their states is an indication that the Rhode Island belief that government should be the direct expression of the will of the people was rather widespread throughout the Union in the early Revolutionary years. Two factors combined in Rhode Island to reinforce this conviction. In the first place, democracy, in the sense of popular control of government, was not a new idea which had suddenly acquired popularity, but rather a way of life deeply rooted in the traditions and experience of the state. In the second place, the propaganda campaign waged against the Continental Impost by the very men who were most active in support of the Constitution a few years later had made the freemen of Rhode Island distrustful of Congress and hostile to any move which might lessen the dependence of Congress on the people. As previously pointed out, David Howell, Theodore Foster, and other opponents of the Impost had convinced the people of Rhode Island that to give Congress the power to levy impost duties, even for a limited period of years, would

make Congress independent of the people and start the nation on the road to monarchy and despotism. If members of Congress, elected in Rhode Island by the direct vote of the people every year and subject to all the popular controls established in the Articles of Confederation, could not safely be entrusted with even a limited power of taxation, it would seem to follow that the government created by the Constitution could not safely be entrusted with far greater powers.

Few of the Rhode Island Anti-Federalists had the education or the literary skill to make the most of their position. Nearly all of the articles against the Constitution by the Rhode Island opposition were demagogic tirades liberally sprinkled with words like "liberty," "monarchy," "tyranny," etc. However, one well-reasoned article published over the pseudonym of "A Newport Man" in the *Newport Mercury* of March 17, 1788, is an excellent statement of the political reasons for Rhode Island's opposition to the Constitution.

We are told that so long as we withhold this power from Congress we shall be a weak, despised people—we was long contending for Independence, and now we are in a passion to be rid of it— . . . It seems rational in a case of this importance to consult the opinion of the best man, and to whom can we better appeal than to J. J. Rousseau, a republican by birth and education, one of the most exalted geniuses and one of the greatest writers of his age, or perhaps any age, . . . one who has wrote a Volume on Government entitled the Social Contract, wherein he inculcates that people should examine and determine every public act themselves, his words are that "every law that the people have not ratified in person is void it is no law. The people of England think they are free, they are much mistaken, they are so but during the election of members of Parliament, as soon as they are elected, they are slaves, they are nothing, and by the use they make of their liberty, during the short moments they possess it, they well deserve to loose it." — This is far from advising that thirty thousand souls should resign their judgments and wishes intirely to one man for two years, to a man, who, perhaps, may go from home sincere and patriotic, but by the time he has dined in pomp for a week with the Wealthy citizens of New York and Philadelphia, will have lost all his rigid ideas of economy and equality, he will be fascinated with the elegancies and luxuries of wealth, these splendid appearances with some hints from his prerogative acquaintance, that if Government were fixed, and the perquisites of office sufficient to induce a man of abilities to accept, no doubt you, or one of your sons, would be the man for your quarter; objects and intimations like these soon change the champion for the people to an advocate

for power, and the people finding themselves thus basely betrayed, cry that virtue is but a name. We are not sure that men have more virtue at this time and place than they had in England at the time of George the 2d, let any one look into the history of those times, and see with what boldness men changed sides and deserted the people in pursuit of profit and power. If to take up the cross and renounce the pomps and vanities of this brutal world is a hard lesson for devines, 'tis much harder for politicians,—a Cincinnatus, a Cato, a Fabricious, and a Washington are rarely to be found. . . .

If it were necessary to cite more precedents to prove that the people ought not to trust or remove their power any further from them, the little Republic of Lucca may be mentioned, . . . Mr. Addison says, is for the extent of its dominion the richest and best peopled of all the States of Italy—and he says further that “the whole administration of the government passes into different hands every two months.” This is very far from confirming the doctrine of choosing their officers for two years who were before chosen for one . . .

The article quoted above attacks the two year tenure of the House of Representatives. The six year term of office of Senators and the inability of the state legislatures to instruct or recall members of the Senate was a more frequent source of criticism.

The government created by the Constitution was intended to be a *representative* government rather than a direct or pure democracy. Whether elected directly or indirectly, it was expected that Congress and the President would be representative in the sense that they would have a considerable independence of the voters. As George Clymer said in the Constitutional Convention, “A representative is appointed to think *for* and not *with* the people.” The Federalists did not believe in what they called the “airy phantoms of pure democracy.”<sup>74</sup> They maintained that “Democracy must be seasoned at least, with Aristocracy, if not with Monarchy.”<sup>75</sup> The Rhode Island opponents of the Constitution believed in democracy and majority rule at home because they were the majority. The Federalist minority, on the other hand, believed that democracy must be checked and balanced, that the people must be restrained, and that public views must be refined and enlarged by placing power in the hands of representatives removed from the direct control of the people.

<sup>74</sup>Newport Herald, July 5, 1787.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1787.

Both the Rhode Island Federalists and the Anti-Federalists advocated a system of checks and balances within the federal government. But they believed in checks and balances for opposite reasons. With minor exceptions the Rhode Island Anti-Federalists supported checks and balances because they distrusted a central government removed from their direct control. On the other hand, the Federalists wanted a check and balance system because they feared that in the end the majority of the people would get control over that central government.

When the Rhode Island Convention, which finally adopted the Constitution, met in South Kingstown in March, 1790, they adopted a long and detailed Bill of Rights and an additional twenty one Amendments, which together take up six printed pages. The Convention then adjourned and asked the voters to consider in town meetings the Bill of Rights and Amendments proposed by the Convention. Since the whole Bill of Rights and all but four of the Amendments were taken over with but slight verbal changes from the recommendations of other states, we should not put too much stress on these proposals. The fourth section of the Rhode Island Bill of Rights dealing with religious freedom is the same proposal which originated in Virginia and was later adopted with slight change by New York and North Carolina. The Rhode Island Bill of Rights contains the same insistence on the natural or "unalienable" rights of man. We are also told "That all power is naturally vested in, and consequently derived from the People; that magistrates therefore are their trustees and agents, and at all times amenable to them." These statements together with the assertion "That the powers of government may be reassumed by the people, whensoever it shall become necessary to their happiness" are strongly reminiscent of the famous second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. In adopting the foregoing statements, however, Rhode Island was but following in the footsteps of Virginia, New York, and North Carolina.

When the Rhode Island Bill of Rights and Amendments were referred to the freemen in town meetings, in between the sessions of the Convention, at least five of the towns (Charlestown, Glocester, Middletown, Richmond, and North Kingstown) insisted on an additional amendment, giving the state legislatures the right to recall their Senators at any time and elect others in their place. This

proposal was added to the Rhode Island Amendments when the Convention reconvened. The same five towns, with the exception of Glocester, also insisted that Senators and Representatives should be paid by the states rather than by Congress.<sup>76</sup> The proposal that members of Congress should be paid by the states rather than by the federal government evidently failed to secure the support of a majority in the Convention. It is possible that other towns supported the same proposals but have left no record of their action. Both the recommendation of the five towns, which was added to the Rhode Island Amendments and the measure that failed of adoption, indicate the strong desire of the Rhode Island freemen to continue the same control over Congress with which they were familiar under the Articles of Confederation. Neither of these recommendations is found in the Bill of Rights or Amendments adopted by the other states.

Many of those who have written of Rhode Island's opposition to the Constitution place chief stress on attachment to state's rights or decentralization. In the writer's opinion, this emphasis on decentralization was simply the result of a belief that all power was dangerous and that government should be the direct expression of the will of the people. Decentralization of power was simply a means to popular control of government, the method of keeping government democratic. Rhode Island considered the majority of the states as more aristocratic than democratic. The Rhode Island people trusted themselves; they did not trust the majority in Congress.

The Federal Bill of Rights was only another means of protecting liberty and guarding against the tendency of the central government to usurp too much power. When the Rhode Island Convention met, the first ten Amendments to the Federal Constitution had already been ratified by eight states. Assuming the ratification of Rhode Island, the favourable action of only one more state was necessary to make our present Bill of Rights part of the Constitution. The almost certain adoption of the first ten Amendments to the Constitution seems to have had but slight influence in Rhode Island. Evidently the Rhode Island Anti-Federalists felt that the recommendations of Congress did not go far enough in checking and restraining the federal government.

<sup>76</sup>Staples, *op. cit.*, pp. 664-666. Town Meeting Records, No. 2, Town of Glocester 1786-1864, Meeting of April 21, 1790.

Rhode Island was the only state that wished to make it more difficult to amend the Constitution. Here the Anti-Federalists found themselves in a major inconsistency. Insisting on twenty-one further amendments to the Constitution, they also wished to make it difficult to make any changes in the Constitution of which they might disapprove. This led to the recommendation that *after 1793* all Constitutional Amendments would have to receive the assent of eleven of the original thirteen states.

We are all familiar with the guarantee of religious freedom contained in the Rhode Island Charter of 1663 still in effect at the time when the Constitution was adopted. However, except for the guarantee of liberty of conscience, Rhode Island had no state bill of rights until 1842. In Rhode Island, as well as the other states, one of the favorite arguments against the Federal Constitution was the absence of a Bill of Rights. Yet not until ten years after the adoption of the Constitution did this state put into statute law the main civil liberties enumerated in the first ten Amendments, and not until the adoption of the new State Constitution in 1842 were these guarantees incorporated into the fundamental law of the state. The Anti-Federalists believed that the most detailed restraints upon Congress were necessary. Evidently they did not think it necessary to restrain themselves.

#### CONCLUSION

It is too much to expect that our forefathers should have been able to foresee all the benefits, direct and indirect, which resulted from the Constitution. The *immediate* economic interests of the Federalist minority, *i. e.*, the mercantile section of the state, required the strengthening of the central authority of the government. However much we may differ today on the degree of centralization we believe desirable, no one in America would wish to return to the Articles of Confederation. What is important today is not that the Constitution at the time of its adoption seemed to benefit most immediately an economic minority, but rather that in the long run the Constitution has served the greater good of all the people. At the time of its ratification the Constitution appeared in several important respects to be contrary to the immediate economic interests of the majority of this state. This is one reason why the Anti-Federalist cause was so strong in Rhode Island.

The best known historians who have presumed to pass judgment on this state's conduct in the period immediately following the Revolution have frequently been rather severe in their condemnation of Rhode Island's conduct. Only in retrospect is it easy to see that Rhode Island's opposition to the Constitution was in many respects narrow and shortsighted.

The greatness of America has been a result of the blending of two great conflicting principles of government which we somewhat loosely call Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian. Each has made its contribution to the strength of this nation. It is fortunate that in the long continued struggle between these two great conflicting philosophies of government, neither the principles of Hamilton nor those of Jefferson were ever completely victorious.

In a letter to the President and Congress of the "eleven" United States of America the Rhode Island General Assembly explained their failure to adopt the Constitution as follows:

The people of this State from its first settlement, have been accustomed and strongly attached to a democratic form of government. They have viewed in the new Constitution an approach, though perhaps but small, toward that form of government from which we have lately dissolved our connection at so much hazard and expense of life and treasure; they have seen, with pleasure, the administration thereof, from the most important trust downwards, committed to men who have highly merited, and in whom the people of the United States place the unbounded confidence; yet, even in this circumstance, in itself so fortunate, they have apprehended danger by way of precedent . . . We are sensible of the extremes to which democratic governments are sometimes liable, something of which we have lately experienced, but we esteem them temporary and partial evils compared with the loss of liberty and the rights of a free people.<sup>77</sup>

The opposition to the Constitution in Rhode Island was strong—because they spoke for the liberal democratic tradition of this state. They spoke for the liberal democratic principles which in the seventeenth and eighteenth century had received greater acceptance both in theory and practice in Rhode Island than in any other part of the world. They spoke for a philosophy of government in some respects more suited to a simple agrarian society that is past, than to the complex industrial society of today. The Rhode Island Anti-Federalists were strong because they spoke for those fundamental

<sup>77</sup>Staples, *op. cit.*, pp. 661-623.



principles of liberty and democracy which the Revolution had popularized and spread throughout the Union. The opponents of the Constitution were strong because they spoke for the vision of a free society—America's greatest contribution to the world.

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### ACCESSIONS

From Dr. Howard K. Turner, *Genealogy of the Descendants of Humphrey Turner . . .*, comp. by Jacob Turner.

From Margaret E. Bailey, 24 letters of William Whitman Bailey, written between 1895 and 1905.

From Colin M. Makepeace, material issued by R. I. Philatelic Society, 1946, to commemorate 100th anniversary of Providence Postmaster's stamp.

From the estate of the late Prof. Robert Chambers, 11 albums of R. I. stampless and stamped covers.

By purchase, *Providence Gazette*, Nov. 15, 1766; July 3, 1779.

By purchase, *First Flowers of Our Wilderness*, by James Thomas Flexner.

By purchase, *Index to Genealogical Periodicals*, v.2, by Donald Lines Jacobus.

From Kenneth Shaw Safe, photograph album of Miss Abbott's School faculty and pupils, inventory of John Brown House, Aug. 27, 1897, and miscellaneous material.

From Frances W. Sibley, Abraham Whipple's letter book, 1779-1806. (ms.)

From Charles A. Maguire, quill pen and photostatic copy of the repeal of the act excluding Rhode Islanders from Massachusetts (1638).

From John Nicholas Brown, 1796 broadside, "A comedy called the Jew."

From Mrs. George E. Downing, *The Log Cabin Myth*, by Harold R. Shurtleff.

By exchange, from the Connecticut State Library, 9 issues of *Connecticut Magazine*.

From the author, *Angell's Lane*, by George L. Miner.

From Mrs. Charlotte M. Neal, plat of Stephen Whipple burying ground.

By exchange, *The Carr Book*, by Arthur A. Carr.

From the authors, *Yankee Ship Sailing Cards and More Yankee Ship Sailing Cards*, by Allan Forbes and Ralph Eastman.

From the author, *General William Barton*, by Frank H. Swan.

By exchange, *The History of Woodstock*, v.7 and 8.

From the estate of Mary D. A. Sayles, portraits of William Peckham Bullock and Fila Feke (Townsend) Bullock.



## COLONIAL CHICANERY

Found in the Champlin Papers, now being indexed by Mr. Clarkson A. Collins, 3d., is this interesting letter, which we reproduce to give our readers an insight into the mercantile methods of our colonial ancestors. The writer, Thomas Greene, a Yale man, was a member of the well-known Rhode Island family, but of a branch that had moved to Boston. Greene became one of Boston's most prominent merchants during the first half of the eighteenth century. Daniel Ayrault, to whom the letter was written, occupied a corresponding position in the social and commercial life of Newport.

Boston March 22nd; 1735

Mr. Danl. Ayrault junr.

Sr

Since writeing the Inclosed A thought Came into my Head which if it Could be brought to Perfection would Clear us from Our Difficulty which is this. if you Could get the Captain to Sign a New Bill of Ladeing for Nathls. Goods & Consign them to the order of Thos. Greene in Madera & not lett the Captain know it when he does it, it would Cut off that Memorandum of Brothr. Nathls. which is the Greatest Article against us. it might be Done thus get him to Drink a Mugg or 2 of Phlipp and as he is poor & wants Money offer to lett him have twenty or 30/shillings & take his Receipts for it in part of his wages but where he is to Sign lett the bottom of the Bill of Ladeing be So that his Name may be on the Bill of Ladeing insted of the receipts. this may seem at first an underhand tricking way but as it will not hurt the Captain nor any Particular Person nor is done with nosuch View but only to Cutt off the Memord. above mentioned, I think there is Nothing of evil in itt. Inclosed is one of the originall Bills of Ladeing with which this must run parrellel as this must be kept very private I Could depend on No one to do it somuch as You. Could You bring it to Perfection it would be of Vast advantage

I am with due respects, Sr Yo Most Humble. Servt.

Thos. Greene

PS if you dont bring it to Perfection burn this

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Index to The Early Records of the Town of Providence, volumes 1-XXI*  
... by Richard LeBaron Bowen, president of the Rhode Island Historical Society. Providence, Rhode Island Historical Society, 1949. xii, 97p.

An *Index to the Early Records of the Town of Providence* has long been needed. The twenty-one volumes of *Records*, published from 1892 to 1915, are indexed in each volume, but it takes considerable time to search through the entire series for a single name; and the separate indexes complicate the situation by entering names under their many and differing spellings, instead of under the most common form of name. The present consolidated index is the result of the needs of Richard LeBaron Bowen for help in work on the history of Rehoboth. He has prepared a name and place index for the printed *Early Records of the Town of Providence*, and the City of Providence has financed the publication of the volume. It is the first book published by the Rhode Island Historical Society in sixteen years. The result is highly satisfactory and a credit to Mr. Bowen's industry and foresight.

The present volume provides an index of names, and then of places, followed by a separate index of the two volumes of gravestone records of the North Burial Ground, which should be indexed separately, since they are chiefly of the nineteenth century and have little connection with the early town records. The index of personal names is virtually a census of the first century of the history of Providence. The name most frequently found in the index is that of Thomas Olney, with 1200 references, followed by Richard Waterman with over 800 references. Roger Williams earns 300 entries. A great help is the differentiation of persons of the same names by generations or by descriptive titles. Since the twenty-one volumes contained 5156 pages and 2,080,000 words, the helpfulness of this consolidated index is apparent.

To give good measure for his volume Mr. Brown has provided, in an appendix of eleven pages, a series of helpful notes on previous Rhode Island genealogical undertakings. He describes Austin's *Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island* and indexes the families included, lists the families in G. Andrews Moriarity's additions and corrections to Austin, which have appeared in the *American Genealogist*, and lists the Rhode Island genealogies to be found in various other historical and genealogical publications. These additional pages are of much assistance to the student of Rhode Island genealogy.

Although the book under review is professedly an index of names and places in the twenty-one printed volumes of *Records*, it might have been well if Mr. Bowen had mentioned in his preface the five *Reports* of the Record Commissioners printed from 1892 to 1897, and especially the *Fourth Report* and the *Fifth Report* which in themselves were books of 240 and 171 pages, larger actually than several of the volumes in the series of *Records*. The two *Reports* are of much historical value in that they provide a subject index to nearly 8400 documents dated from 1639 to 1823. The index to the *Reports* is by subjects such as Bridges, Highways, Poor, Revolution, and Taverns, but nearly every entry contains the name of a person. These 8000 or more names are

inaccessible except by reading every page of the subject index. The *Fourth Report* also includes the name index of 500 names in Paper-money Bank Mortgages, and an index of plats of streets and highways before 1800, selected from files in the office of the City Clerk. Perhaps these two volumes should be separately indexed.

Mr. Bowen is entitled to much credit for compiling this Index. It must have been arduous work for him to superintend so many details of printing in the midst of a busy manufacturing life, but I hope that he realizes that scholars are greatly indebted to him and rejoice that he has produced so valuable a reference book.

CLARENCE S. BRIGHAM

American Antiquarian Society

*A Rhode Island Chaplain in the Revolution. Letters of Ebenezer David to Nicholas Brown, 1775-1778*, edited by Jeannette D. Black and William Greene Roelker. Providence, The Rhode Island Society of the Cincinnati, 1949. xxi. 82p.

This handsome little volume offers a glimpse of life in Washington's Army as seen by a young minister of the Seventh-Day Baptists. Ebenezer David graduated from Rhode Island College (Brown University) in 1772, and was probably about twenty-four years old when he became Chaplain of Colonel James Mitchell Varnum's 1st Rhode Island Regiment. In the next two years he served this regiment and Colonel William Bond's 25th Continental Regiment at the siege of Boston and at New York, Ticonderoga, and the Hudson River Highlands. Later in 1777 he was with Colonel Israel Angell's 2d Rhode Island Regiment on the Delaware and was present at the evacuation of Fort Mifflin. Apparently life in the army stimulated in David an interest in medicine, for his last letter, written shortly before he died of a "putrid fever," indicates that he had begun the study of medicine and was about to start work in the army hospital at Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

\* There is nothing new or startling in any of these letters, but they do add detail to our picture of the Revolution: the men in camp distressing the chaplain by their profanity, the British officer who was ready to get out of the country and let the Americans cut each other's throats, the civilians and soldiers alike worrying about inflation. The letters do not form a continuous series, but the editors have filled the gaps by concise summaries of the military situation preceding each letter. Moreover, every letter has been thoroughly annotated: all the persons mentioned are identified and obscure phrases explained. The book is illustrated by an early view of Brown University, a woodcut of a Baptismal ceremony on the Schuylkill River, and a contemporary map of the Delaware River Region.

EDMUND S. MORGAN

Brown University

# RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## NEW MEMBERS

*June 1, 1949 — August 31, 1949*

Mrs. Mark W. Adair

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Sunday afternoon 3:00 to 5:00

*Library only*

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*Closed Sundays and Tuesday evenings,  
June, July, and August*

## LECTURES

October 5

2:30 p.m.

### The Providence Founders and their Strange Adventures in Religion

ALBERT C. THOMAS, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Providence

\* \* \*

October 12

8:15 p.m.

### The Spermaceti Trust

JAMES B. HEDGES, Professor of History, Brown University

\* \* \*

November 16

8:15 p.m.

### The French in Rhode Island — Unknown Treasures of French American History

GILBERT CHINARD, Professor of French Literature, Princeton University

\* \* \*

November 30

2:30 p.m.

### When Robert Feke met John Smibert in Newport and What Followed

HENRY WILDER FOOTE, Author of *Robert Feke, Colonial Portrait Painter*

